The Role of Level and Type of Academic Degree in

Retaining Social Service Workers in Public Child Welfare

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Executive Summary

The Role and Level of Academic Degree in

Retaining Social Service Workers in Public Child Welfare

Introduction

A national crisis in the retention of public child welfare workers threatens the well-being, safety, and permanency of children and families in the states' care and drives agency costs higher (American Public Human Services Association, 2005; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Balfour & Neff, 1993; Drake & Yadama, 1996; Government Accounting Office, 2003; Graef & Hill, 2000; Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, 2004).

The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (KCHFS, 2005) cited data indicating alarmingly high retention and turnover rates among the state's welfare workforce (Ruth Huebner, personal communication, August, 2005). Therefore, research was conducted to identify and study impacting factors.

An extensive literature review suggests that the education level of social workers strongly affects employment turnover (Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research [IASWR], 2005). Mor Barak and colleagues (2001) confirmed this in their study, stating that demographics, including education, "are among the most common and most conclusive predictors in the turnover literature" (Mor Barak et al., p. 630). This study focuses on the impact of education level and type, and addresses two questions: "Are social service (SS) employees with master's degrees or higher more likely to retain jobs than those with bachelor's degrees?" and "Are SS employees with social work degrees more likely to retain jobs than those with other types of degrees?"

Methods

The research strategy uses secondary personnel data from the KCHFS-Training Resource Information System (TRIS). The original data set included all Department of Community Based Services employees, from September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005. Data were divided and recoded to reflect only SS workers in the Division of Protection and Permanency (DPP). Two DPP subsets were established: short-term employees with 1-2 years' service, and mid-term employees with 2-5 years' service.

The dependent variable, "retention," is the number of SS employees remaining in the public child welfare agency for a period of time (active). The variable, "turnover," is the number of SS employees who left employment in the public child welfare agency (inactive). Computer software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 12.0 (SPSS, 2003), was used to analyze the data; cross tabulation analysis and chi-square tests were used to answer the research questions.

Results

Research results show that SS employees with master's degrees are just as likely to stay during the first five years (retention) as those with bachelor's degrees. Findings also report some statistical evidence that SS employees with bachelor's degrees are more likely to stay in Years Two to Five, and at twice the rate, than employees without degrees. Thus, DPP employees with bachelor's degrees who make it to Year Two are likely to be there at Year Five.

Study Limitations

Initially, the study sought to consider the effects of the level and type of academic degrees on the dependent variables, retention and turnover. However, due to limitations within the data set, the role of degree type was not studied. Other limitations should be noted: the DPP short-term data set contains only a few workers ($N = 17$; 4 inactive; 13 active) with master's degrees.   Thus, analysis is limited in part due to weak statistical power (no significant difference); overall, most SS workers (85%) stayed until Year Two. Also, those workers with master's degrees quit at the same rate as those with bachelor's degrees. Employees staying less than one year were omitted from the study because the active effect would not be present during that time period. Finally, the study did not include SS employees staying over five years because the number of employees inactive due to retirement is unknown.

Conclusions

Findings from this study are applicable to public child welfare, as agencies can utilize these results to develop hiring practices that will positively impact retention and turnover. Statistical evidence supports that there is no difference in turnover between employees with master's degrees and those with bachelor's degrees; therefore, agencies can support hiring masters' level employees to increase staff competency. These results will provide baseline information to evaluate effectiveness of retention and turnover strategies and help to improve state and federal outcome measures, as well as inform policy-making decisions for implementation of more effective retention strategies.

Future studies should research the role of education type and determine whether SS employees with social work degrees are more likely to retain their jobs than those with other degrees. In addition, future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of retention improvement efforts. Findings from such investigations could help to develop improved CHFS policies for job requirements and hiring practices.

While the results of this study are valuable to address problems of retention and turnover for public child welfare workers, the supporting research is limited. Education is an important influence, but researchers commonly agree that considering a single factor to be *the* answer for this issue will produce limited results (Dickinson & Perry, 2002; IAWSR, 2005). Addressing a combination of personal and organizational factors is more likely to improve retention and turnover over the long-term (IAWSR, 2005).

Abstract

Across the nation a crisis in the retention of public child welfare workers threatens the well-being, safety, and permanency of children and families in the states' care and drives agency costs higher and higher. Despite a proliferation of studies on the issue, there is a limited understanding about the reasons for the excessive levels of turnover among this group. This study utilizes secondary data to explore questions concerning the role of the level and type of academic degree in retaining social service employees in public child welfare. Results of the study provide baseline information useful to evaluate the effectiveness of retention/turnover strategies and to help improve state and federal outcomes and measures.

Introduction

In public child welfare across the country there is a serious problem of retention/turnover among social service employees. Such a threatens the well-being, safety, and permanency of the states' most vulnerable population and inflates agency costs (American Public Human Services Association [APHSA], 2005; Annie E. Casey Foundation [AECF], 2003; Balfour & Neff, 1993; Drake & Yadama, 1996; Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2003; Graef & Hill, 2000; Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care [PCCFC], 2004).

In Kentucky, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) is concerned about the well-being, safety, permanency, and protection of the children and adults in their care (CHFS, 2005). In August of 2005, Dr. Ruth Huebner, CHFS Research Administrator, identified preliminary data indicating alarmingly high retention/turnover rates among the state's welfare workforce. As a result, exploratory research is being proposed to identify and study factors impacting social service worker retention/turnover across the state (Ruth Huebner, personal communication, August, 2005).

An extensive literature review suggests numerous factors that can influence retention and turnover. Mor Barak, Nissly, and Levin (2001) report findings that consider education a significant predictor of turnover. Moreover, the study maintains that demographic factors, of which education is one, "… are among the most common and most conclusive predictors in the turnover literature" (p. 630). Similarly, the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (2005) identifies level of education as one of the most consistent personal characteristics that can impact retention/turnover. Consequently, this study focuses on the impact that education level and type has on the dependent variable of retention/turnover.

The research strategy utilized secondary data to answer two main questions: (a) Are social service employees with a master's degree or higher more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with bachelor's degrees? (b) Are social service employees with a social work degree more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with other types of degrees?

Literature Review

Employee retention and turnover is an important issue that critically impacts public child welfare systems. The enormity of the issue and the potential consequences have gained the attention of the nation, as evidenced by reports from the Government Accounting Office (GAO), the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (IASWR), the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA), Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), the Alliance for Children and Families (ACF), and through a collaborative survey done by APHSA, CWLA, and the ACF. These reports indicate that the crisis of high turnover among public child welfare workers threatens the performance of child welfare systems and hinders the achievement of positive outcomes of children and families connected to those systems (AECF, 2005; APHSA, 2005; CWLA, 2005; Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005; GAO, 2004; IASWR, 2005; NAPCWA, 2005).

The U. S. Government Accounting Office (2003) reports the annual turnover rate for child welfare caseworkers is between 30-40% nationwide, which impacts both recruitment and retention efforts—child welfare workers' average tenure is less than two years. Yet, other studies suggest the rate is not quite as definitive. For example, contrary to the GAO (2003) report, the AECF (2003) report estimated the average turnover in public child welfare at approximately 20% annually and APHSA reports the average annual turnover rate in 2003 at 22.1%. While some variation in reported rates exists, research results consistently report the average annual turnover rate at 20% or higher and acknowledges that this is problematic nationwide (AECF, 2003, 2005; APHSA, 2005; CWLA, 2005; Flower et al., 2005; GAO, 2003, 2004; IASWR, 2005; NAPCWA, 2005).

Overall, findings suggest that high turnover and staffing shortages encroach on the time that remaining workers have to conduct and complete the types of home visits needed to assess children's safety and to put together well-supported decisions that allow certain children to receive safe, stable, and permanent placements. Additionally, high turnover disrupts continuity of services, affects timeliness of investigations, and impinges on the frequency and duration of visits with children and families. Thus, evidence indicates that retention and turnover hinders the attainment of important federal safety and permanency outcome measures (AECF, 2005; APHSA, 2005; CWLA, 2005; Flower et al., 2005; GAO, 2004; IASWR, 2005; NAPCWA, 2005).

Although the consequences of high turnover in public child welfare are apparent and commonly understood, the determinants for such turnover are less evident. Studies on retention and turnover in public child welfare generally identify a combination of personal and organizational factors that contribute to retention/turnover (AECF, 2003; APHSA, 2005; Arches, 1991; Balfour & Neff, 1993; IASWR, 2005).

IAWSR (2005) offers a range of personal and organizational conditions that influence employee retention/turnover. Personal factors that positively influence employees to remain in public child welfare include: education, personal characteristics, efficacy, previous experience, job satisfaction, and professional commitment. Attributes of burnout such as role overload,

conflict, stress, and emotional exhaustion are negative personal influences that impact retention. The IAWSR (2005) also reports that organizational influences (i.e., better salary, an environment that values and supports employees, and reasonable workloads) contribute positively to employee retention. There is a growing consensus among researchers that the issue of retention and turnover among public child welfare workers is complex and no one factor is responsible for retention and turnover (AECF, 2003; APHSA, 2005; Arches, 1991; Balfour & Neff, 1993; IASWR, 2005).

Mor Barak and colleagues' (2001) meta-analysis of 25 articles on turnover among social work, social service, and human service employees report that these studies are often inconsistent with each other due to the complexity of defining and measuring a diverse range of predictor and outcome constructs along with variation in study contexts (Mor Barak et al., 2001). The IAWSR (2005) systematic review and synthesis of research studies on factors influencing retention of child welfare staff reported similar findings. The review indicated that "…variations in definition and scope made systematic comparisons across studies more complex than anticipated" (p. 4). Retention was named as the dependent variable in most of the studies; however, one study named both retention and turnover as the dependent variable. Adding to the complexity of synthesis, only a few studies operationally identified the dependent variable and each one differently (IAWSR, 2005). For example, turnover was defined as job exit in one study and as intent to leave in another. Ellet and colleagues (2000, 2003, as cited by IAWSR, 2005) recognized retention as "intention to remain employed in child welfare" … [and Olson and Sutton (2003) identified retention as] "remaining in child welfare after completion of the Title IV-E contract" (as cited by IAWSR, 2005, p. 35).

Additionally, IASWR (2005) reported "there was also variation in the educational levels and backgrounds of the workers studied. This was due to both variations in study design, as well as the diversity of minimum qualifications required for child welfare staff across the country" (p. 4). Thus, these differences made difficult recommendations for minimum staffing requirements, as well as complicating the understanding of what constitutes a reasonable expectation of time for workers to remain on the job (IASWR, 2005).

The intention of this study was to better understand the role of level and type of academic degree in retaining social service workers in public child welfare in Kentucky. The research strategy involved utilizing secondary data to answer two main questions: (a) Are social service employees with master's degrees or higher more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with bachelor's degrees? (b) Are social service employees with social work degrees more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with other types of degrees?

The relationship between degree and retention/turnover has been of interest for over five decades. Debates have focused on what level and type of education and training is most advantageous for child welfare staff and whether agencies should seek to hire and retain employees with social work degrees for front-line positions (Zlotnik, 2002). This issue has gained increasing significance over the past 15 years with the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-189), the institution of Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs), and as public child welfare agencies attempt to meet accreditation standards through the Council on Accreditation. Consequently, the topic has a high degree of importance for

agencies striving to meet state and federal outcomes and to improve retention rates among social service staff (APHSA, 2005; Zlotnik, 2002).

The influence of education on retention/turnover rates in public child welfare is difficult to assess. The diversity of studies makes comparison and inference difficult. For example, Olson and Sutton (2003) compared MSW Title IV-E graduates with and without BSW degrees and reported "no statistically significant differences in the intentions to remain employed" (as cited by IAWSR, 2005, p. 39). In this study, the findings are arguable because the analysis is likely to have been affected by the small sample size. Contrary to the Olson and Sutton (2003) report, Rosenthal et al. (Rosenthal, McDowell, & White, 1998, as cited by IAWSR, 2005) claim employees with "a master's degree in human service fields other than social work had better retention than those with a master's in social work, or non-human services degree" (p. 39). Rosenthal et al. considered all types of human service degrees in their study, while Olson and Sutton looked exclusively at social work degrees. Hence, this comparison exemplifies the difficulty one encounters when reviewing retention/turnover studies.

Only a few studies evaluate retention/turnover interventions and most generally concentrate on conditions and offer strategies that might influence the turnover rate. While literature suggests a range of strategies to be implemented by agencies, evaluative studies that look at the effectiveness and outcomes of these strategies are seemingly non-existent (IAWSR, 2005). The APHSA (2005) survey reported on the only retention strategy the IAWSR (2005) found was evaluated—Title IV-E Education for Child Welfare Practice programs. The state child welfare survey reported that 94% of the states claimed to have increased and/or improved in-service training to boost retention. Additionally, 63% regarded this training as somewhat effective and 37% reported it to be highly effective (APHSA, 2005). Yet, IAWSR (2005) could not uncover one study that substantiated this claim by testing for effectiveness. Thus, a gap in research literature exists that suggests a critical need for studies that evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of intervention strategies for retention and turnover.

In addition, the limitations of existing studies support the need to build a framework to better understand the issues. Accordingly, the results of this research study expect to contribute to this endeavor by creating a baseline. Study findings, and those of similar research efforts in the state, will help move the agency forward in achieving strategic public child welfare goals and objectives. Consequently, such research will enable the agency to better evaluate the effectiveness of existing retention and turnover strategies as well as establishing future interventions. As a result, the state's retention and turnover rates will likely improve.

Methodology

The study used secondary personnel data from the Cabinet for Health and Family Service's, Training Resource Information System (TRIS). CHFS-DCBS cleaned, edited, coded, and stripped the data set of all identifiers before releasing the data set. Hence, participants' anonymity and confidentiality is protected and there is no harm to human subjects.

The study population consists of employees of the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS)—Department of Community Based Services (DCBS), from September

1, 2004 to August 31, 2005.   The population size is 5,079.   The population age range is approximately 18 to 65 years of age. The population gender includes both female and male. The ethnic background and the health status of the study population are unknown. The criterion for inclusion is all DCBS employees from September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005.

The original data set that includes all Department of Community Based Services (DCBS) employees was divided and recoded to reflect only social service employees in the Division of Protection and Permanency (DPP). Due to time constraints the study population was narrowed to focus exclusively on DPP workers. The population in this Division clearly represents social service employees in public child welfare.   Two subsets were established for the following analyses: 1) short-term DPP employees with at least one year of service and not more than two; and mid-term DPP employees with at least 2 years of service and up to five years. Variables examined were: Position; DOB; Inactive date; Hire date; Bachelors, Masters, or PhD (yes/no) field; fields for Type of degree; Age, Gender; Race, and Hispanic ethnicity; Total number of training hours; PCWCP status; Job classification; Region; and County.

The dependent variable retention/turnover is defined as follows: "turnover" is operationally defined as social service employees who left employment in the public child welfare agency (inactive) and "retention" defined as social service employees remaining in the public child welfare agency for a period of time (active) during two windows of observation: between 1-2 years employment, and between 2-5 years employment.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS; 2003) software was used to analyze the data. The statistical analysis included: frequency distributions, descriptive statistics, cross tabulation, and chi-square tests.

Frequency distributions were used to describe quantitative data: gender, race, region, and age. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of the distribution age.

Cross tabulation analysis was used to answer the research question "Are social service employees with master's degrees or higher more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with bachelor's degrees?" and "Are workers with bachelor's degrees more likely to retain their jobs than workers without a bachelor's degree?" The model examined the main effect of degree (master's or higher/bachelor's) on social service workers (SSW) and non social service workers (NSSW).

The chi-square test was used to compare the two groups' rate of retention and turnover: social service employees with master's degrees/higher were compared with social service employees with no degree or non specified; and social service employees with bachelor's degrees were compared with social service workers with no degree or non specified.

The second question "Are social service employees with a social work degree more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with other types of degrees?" was not answered due to limitations within the data set.

Data Analysis

Data Set Two – Short Term Employees

The first group of interest, short-term retention and turnover (inactive/active workers between year one and two) is comprised of 161 DPP employees between the age of 20 and 61 with a median age of 29; 133 employees are female and 28 are male. The racial composition is 136 Caucasians, 18 African Americans, one American Indian, one Hispanic employee, one not specified, and four others.

The cross tabulation analysis expected count for inactive employees with a master's degree is 2.5; the inactive count is 4. The active expected count is 14.5 and the active count 13. Thus, thirteen masters' level employees stayed between year one and year two and four employees left. The employees with no degree or not specified revealed 20 inactive and 124 active employees; the expected count was 21.5 and 122.5 respectively. The chi-square = 1.114, (df=1), p=. 291 (*Figure 1*). There is no significant difference. The sample size contains so few masters' degrees; consequently, the statistical power is weak. While there is a slight difference the small sample size prohibits saying with confidence that there is a significant difference.

The bachelor's degree employee's inactive expected count is 21.8 and inactive count is 21. The active expected count is 124.2 and active count 125. DPP employees with no degree or not specified inactive expected count is 2.2; the inactive count is 3. The active expected count is 12.8 and the active count 12. Of the 161 short-term DPP employees the vast majority have a bachelor's degree only fifteen are without bachelors, again resulting in weak statistical power. There is no significant difference. The chi-square = .338, (df=1), p=. 561 (*Figure 2*).

Data Set Three – Mid-Term Employees

The second group of interest, mid-term retention and turnover (inactive/active workers between year two and year five) is made up of 675 DPP employees between the age of 24 and 68 with a median age of 32; 583 employees are female and 92 are male. The racial composition is 593 Caucasians, 75 African Americans, two American Indians, one Asian, one Hispanic, and three others.

The cross tabulation analysis expected count for inactive employees with a master's degree is 12.7; the inactive count is 13. The active expected count is 83.3; the active count is 83. The no degree or not specified inactive expected count is 76.3; the inactive count 76. The active expected count is 502.7; the active count is 503. The chi-square=. 012, (df=1), p= .911 (*Figure 3*). There is no significant difference.

The bachelor's degree inactive expected count is 77.1; the inactive count 69. The active expected count is 507.9; the active count 516. The no degree or not specified inactive expected count is 11.9; the inactive count is 20. The active expected count is 78.1; the active count is 70. The chi-square=7.409, (df=1), p= .006 (*Figure 4*). There is statistical significance.

Data Set Two – Short Term Employees

Masters recoded * Active Crosstabulation

			Active		
			inactive	active	Total
Masters recoded	No degree or Not Specified	Count	20	124	144
		Expected Count	21.5	122.5	144.0
		% within Masters recoded	13.9%	86.1%	100.0%
	Degrere	Count	4	13	17
		Expected Count	2.5	14.5	17.0
		% within Masters recoded	23.5%	76.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	137	161
		Expected Count	24.0	137.0	161.0
		% within Masters recoded	14.9%	85.1%	100.0%

Figure 1. Chi-square=1.114, (df=1), p=. 291. There is no significant difference. There is a slight difference; however, the small sample size prohibits saying with confidence that there is a significant difference—statistical power is weak.

Bachelors recoded * Active Crosstabulation

			Active		
			inactive	active	Total
Bachelors recoded	No degree or Not Specified	Count	3	12	15
		Expected Count	2.2	12.8	15.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
	Degrere	Count	21	125	146
		Expected Count	21.8	124.2	146.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	14.4%	85.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	137	161
		Expected Count	24.0	137.0	161.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	14.9%	85.1%	100.0%

Figure 2. Chi-square=. 338, (df=1), p=. 561. There is no significant difference. Of the 161 short-term DPP employees the vast majority have a bachelor's degree only fifteen are without a bachelor's degree.

Data Set Three – Mid-Term Employees

Masters recoded * Active Crosstabulation

			Active		Total
			inactive	active	
Masters recoded	No degree or Not Specified	Count	76	503	579
		Expected Count	76.3	502.7	579.0
		% within Masters recoded	13.1%	86.9%	100.0%
	Degrere	Count	13	83	96
		Expected Count	12.7	83.3	96.0
		% within Masters recoded	13.5%	86.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	89	586	675
		Expected Count	89.0	586.0	675.0
		% within Masters recoded	13.2%	86.8%	100.0%

Figure 3. Chi-square=. 012, (df=1), p= .911. There is no significant difference (Appendix B).

Bachelors recoded * Active Crosstabulation

			Active		Total
			inactive	active	
Bachelors recoded	No degree or Not Specified	Count	20	70	90
		Expected Count	11.9	78.1	90.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
	Degrere	Count	69	516	585
		Expected Count	77.1	507.9	585.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	11.8%	88.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	89	586	675
		Expected Count	89.0	586.0	675.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	13.2%	86.8%	100.0%

Figure 4. Chi-square=7.409, (df=1), p= .006. There is statistical significance.

Discussion

Interpretation of Results

Results of the study show that social service employees with a masters' degree are just as likely to stay during their first five years of employment as those with a bachelors' degree. Social service employees with a masters' degree are not more likely to leave or to stay than those with a bachelors' degree. Research findings report some statistical evidence that social service employees with a bachelor's degree are more likely to stay in year two to five than employees without a degree. The results show those with a bachelor's degree are more likely to stay at year two till year five at twice the rate of social service employees without a bachelor's degree. Thus, DPP employees with a bachelor's degree who make it to year two are likely to be there at year five.

Study Limitations

Initially, the research study intended to consider the roles of the level and type of academic degree on the dependent variable, retention/turnover. However, due to limitations within the data set the role of degree type was not studied.

The DPP short-term data set contains only a few social service workers with masters' degrees (N=17; 4 inactive; 13 active). Thus, the analysis is limited in part because the statistical power is weak; the analysis indicated no statistical difference. Overall most social service workers stayed until year two (137 of 161). Social service workers with masters' degrees quit at the same rate as those with a bachelor's degree.

DPP social service employees were divided into two subsets: between 1-2 years employment, and between 2-5 years employment. Social service employees staying less than one year were not included in the study because the active effect would not be present during that time period; hence, this group is not helpful in answering the research questions. The study did not include social service employees staying over five years because it is not known which employees became inactive due to retirement.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study are applicable to public child welfare—social work practice— and the results did answer the main question: (a) Are social service employees with a master's degree or higher more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with bachelor's degree? Findings show that DPP social service employees with a bachelors' degree are more likely to remain in year two till year five than social service employees without a degree. In fact statistical evidence indicates they are more likely to stay at twice the rate of social service employees without a degree. Findings reveal social service employees with a bachelors' degree who make it to year two are likely to be there at year five. Public child welfare agencies can utilize these findings in developing hiring practices that reflect the results of the study; thus, impacting retention and turnover positively.

Subsequently, results show that social service employees with a masters' degree are just as likely to stay as those with a bachelors' degree. These findings are useful to public child welfare agencies concerned that masters level employees are more likely to leave than bachelor level employees. The results indicate that social service employees with a masters' degree are not more likely to leave or to stay than those with a bachelors' degree. Hence, the study results are useful to social work practice and public child welfare agencies concerned about hiring masters' level employees at the risk of increasing turnover. Statistical evidence supports that there is no difference; thus, agencies can turn their attention to hiring masters' level employees and increasing staff competency.

Results from this study provide baseline information useful to evaluate the effectiveness of retention/turnover strategies and to help improve state and federal outcome measures. Findings in this report establish retention/turnover rates for the period of time between September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005 and offer a base for identifying changes in retention/turnover rates that may result as program changes are implemented.   Moreover, the findings are useful to inform policy-making decisions regarding implementation of more effective retention strategies.

Implications for Future Research

Future studies should consider the role of type of education and strive to answer question (b) Are social service employees with a social work degree more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with other types of degrees? The answer to this question will be useful to retention/turnover issues. In addition the answer to this question will be helpful in developing CHFS policies regarding job requirements and hiring practice.

This study considered the role of the level of academic degree on the dependent variable, retention/turnover. While the results of the study are valuable to addressing the problem of retention and turnover for public child welfare workers, the supporting research is limited. Education is an important influence, but researchers commonly agree that taking only one factor as *the* answer for the retention/turnover problem will produce limited results (Dickinson & Perry, 2001; IAWSR, 2005).   However, implementing a combination of personal factors and organizational factors is more likely to improve retention and turnover over the long-term (IAWSR, 2005).

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EDUCATION LEVEL AND JOB RETENTION

Retaining Social Service Workers
in Public Child Welfare

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Intro: Topic

- In public child welfare there is a serious problem of retention/turnover among social service workers.

- A crisis of retaining competent public child welfare workers threatens the well being, safety, and permanency of the states most vulnerable population

- and drives agency costs higher and higher (Balfour & Neff, 1993; Drake & Yadama, 1996; GAO, 2003; Graef & Hill, 2000)

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Review of Literature

Despite a proliferation of studies on the issue, there is a limited understanding about the reasons for the excessive levels of retention/turnover among this group

Review of Literature

- Previous research findings identify education as a significant and common predictor of turnover (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001)

- IASWR (2005) identifies level of education as one of the most consistent personal characteristics that can impact retention/turnover (Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research [IASWR])

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Research

This study considers the role of level and type of academic degree on the dependent variable, retention/turnover

Research Question(s)

(a) **Are social service employees with a master's degree or higher more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with bachelor's degrees?**

(b) Are social service employees with a social work degree more likely to retain their jobs than social service employees with other types of degrees?

Methodology

- The participants in study are all Department of Community Based (DCBS) social service workers at the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) in Kentucky

Methodology

- Exploratory Study using secondary personnel data

- All identifiers removed - allowing PI to review data without harm to human subjects

- Data set divided/recoded - reflects Division of Protection and Permanency (DPP) employees

- Two subsets – 1 to 2 years; 2 to 5 years

- Variables – age, gender, race, education level & type, hire/inactive date, training, job classification, region, and county

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Methodology

The dependent variable retention/turnover is defined as follows:

"turnover" as social service employees who left employment in the public child welfare agency (inactive); and

"retention" as social service employees remaining in the public child welfare agency for a period of time (active)

Data Analysis

- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS 12.0)

- Statistical tests: frequency distribution, descriptive statistics, cross tabulations, and chi-square tests

Findings: Short-Term 1 to 2 yrs

Frequencies

Sex

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	F	133	82.6	82.6	82.6
	M	28	17.4	17.4	100.0
	Total	161	100.0	100.0	

Race

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African American	18	11.2	11.2	11.2
	American Indian	1	.6	.6	11.8
	Caucasian	136	84.5	84.5	96.3
	Hispanic	1	.6	.6	96.9
	Not Specified	1	.6	.6	97.5
	Other	4	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	161	100.0	100.0	

Statistic

Age

N	Valid	160
	Missing	1
Mean		32.79
Median		29.00
Mode		26
Std. Deviation		9.524

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Masters recoded * Active Crosstabulation

			Active		
			inactive	active	Total
Masters recoded	No degree or Not Specified	Count	20	124	144
		Expected Count	21.5	122.5	144.0
		% within Masters recoded	13.9%	86.1%	100.0%
	Degrere	Count	4	13	17
		Expected Count	2.5	14.5	17.0
		% within Masters recoded	23.5%	76.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	137	161
		Expected Count	24.0	137.0	161.0
		% within Masters recoded	14.9%	85.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.114[b]	1	.291		
Continuity Correction [a]	.484	1	.487		
Likelihood Ratio	.994	1	.319		
Fisher's Exact Test				.287	.233
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.107	1	.293		
N of Valid Cases	161				

a. Computed only for a 2x2 table

b. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.53.

Short-Term 1 to 2 yrs

Bachelors recoded * Active Crosstabulation

			Active		Total
			inactive	active	
Bachelors recoded	No degree or Not Specified	Count	3	12	15
		Expected Count	2.2	12.8	15.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
	Degrere	Count	21	125	146
		Expected Count	21.8	124.2	146.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	14.4%	85.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	24	137	161
		Expected Count	24.0	137.0	161.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	14.9%	85.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.338[b]	1	.561		
Continuity Correction[a]	.040	1	.841		
Likelihood Ratio	.314	1	.575		
Fisher's Exact Test				.471	.393
Linear-by-Linear Association	.336	1	.562		
N of Valid Cases	161				

a. Computed only for a 2x2 table

b. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2 24.

Findings: Mid-Term 2 to 5 yrs

Frequencies

Sex

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	F	583	86.4	86.4	86.4
	M	92	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	675	100.0	100.0	

Race

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African American	75	11.1	11.1	11.1
	American Indian	2	.3	.3	11.4
	Asian	1	.1	.1	11.6
	Caucasian	593	87.9	87.9	99.4
	Hispanic	1	.1	.1	99.6
	Other	3	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	675	100.0	100.0	

Statistics

Age

N	Valid	675
	Missing	0
Mean		35.00
Median		32.00
Mode		27
Std. Deviation		9.510

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Masters recoded * Active Crosstabulation

			Active		
			inactive	active	Total
Masters recoded	No degree or Not Specified	Count	76	503	579
		Expected Count	76.3	502.7	579.0
		% within Masters recoded	13.1%	86.9%	100.0%
	Degrere	Count	13	83	96
		Expected Count	12.7	83.3	96.0
		% within Masters recoded	13.5%	86.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	89	586	675
		Expected Count	89.0	586.0	675.0
		% within Masters recoded	13.2%	86.8%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.012 [b]	1	.911		
Continuity Correction [a]	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.012	1	.912		
Fisher's Exact Test				.872	.509
Linear-by-Linear Association	.012	1	.911		
N of Valid Cases	675				

a. Computed only for a 2x2 table

b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.66.

Mid-Term 2 to 5 yrs

Bachelors recoded * Active Crosstabulation

			Active		Total
			inactive	active	
Bachelors recoded	No degree or Not Specified	Count	20	70	90
		Expected Count	11.9	78.1	90.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
	Degrere	Count	69	516	585
		Expected Count	77.1	507.9	585.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	11.8%	88.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	89	586	675
		Expected Count	89.0	586.0	675.0
		% within Bachelors recoded	13.2%	86.8%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.409[b]	1	.006		
Continuity Correction [a]	6.526	1	.011		
Likelihood Ratio	6.510	1	.011		
Fisher's Exact Test				.011	.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.398	1	.007		
N of Valid Cases	675				

a. Computed only for a 2x2 table

b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.87.

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Conclusion: Findings

- Masters level or higher social service workers are no more likely to stay or to leave than those with a bachelors degree

- Some statistical evidence that social service employees with a bachelors degree are more likely to stay in year two to five than employees without a degree

- - those with a bachelor's degree are more likely to stay at year two till year five at twice the rate of social service employees without a bachelor's degree.

Conclusion: Limitations

- DPP short-term data set contains only a few social service workers with masters' degrees (N=17; 4 inactive; 13 active); statistical power is weak

- Secondary data set is not designed to transform degree type

Implications: Social Work Practice

- Findings – support and strengthen CHFS & COA education/hiring standards

- Provide a baseline description for future research/program evaluation

- Only one of many factors related to the issue

Implications: Future Research

This study can be expanded to look at the role of level of academic degree on the dependent variable, retention/turnover in DCBS, Division of Family Support

Future research should consider the role of type of academic degree on the dependent variable, retention/turnover